

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



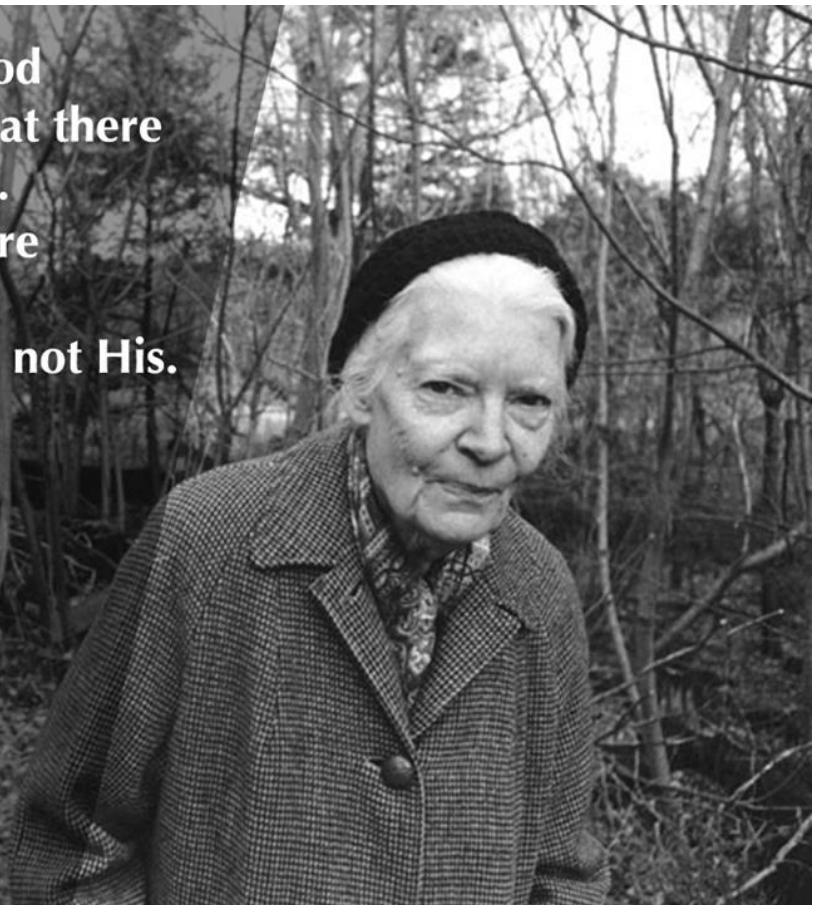
19 FEBRUARY 2023

TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

I am sure that God
did not intend that there
be so many poor.
The class structure
is of our making
and our consent, not His.
It is the way we
have arranged it,
and it is up to us
to change it.



Dorothy Day



WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

HYMN TIS 153 God is love, let heav'n adore him...

Prayer for today

No Safety Net

Christ,
When we step out in faith,
Into your mission,
Out in ministry,
Laying down our lives in love,
There is no safety net,
For that is what faith is.
That is your way,
The way of the cross.
If we misstep,
Or if things go wrong,
You are with us,
But often not to save us.
You are there,
As God,
As Spirit,
Working good into and out of all things,
Protecting our souls,
Guiding our being,
Yet, not always saving our bacon.
Bless us in our faith.
Use us and all that we do,
To build your kingdom.
Help us have faith,
Full of courage and grit,
To stand the test
And be brave and bold,
As we live for you.
Courageously we pray.
Amen

- Jon Humphries

Confession ·

A confession:

God who thirsts,
forgive us for not seeing you.

Forgive us for not seeing you through the precious gift of creation,
affirmed through incarnation,
and brought to devastation,
by our lack of consideration for the land.

Forgive us for not seeing you in the stranger at our door,
who came, seeking something more,
but was locked away offshore,
because we did not know before, what it was to have no home.

But as the flames engulf us now,
and all hope at last seems lost:
We give thanks, that you are not among the clouds,
but here with us,
incarnate,

God who thirsts.

Daniel Mossfield

Assurance of Forgiveness

Here is Good News! God is willing to cleanse us from our pride, our blindness, our stubborn insistence on having things “our way”. Through God’s grace we are washed and forgiven.

Thanks be to God

Amen.

HYMN: TIS 235 A man there lived in Galilee...

Scripture

From the Hebrew scriptures

Exodus 24:12-18

12 The Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.’ 13 So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. 14 To the elders he had said, ‘Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.’

15 Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. 16The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. 17Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. 18Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

From the New Testament

Matthew 17:1-9

The Transfiguration

17Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

HYMN: TIS 234 How good, Lord, to be here!...

SERMON

Sermon to be preached at Ormond Uniting Church on Sunday, 19th February 2022. Refer to the reading from *Matthew* above.

It's a puzzlement!

Do you remember the movie, *The King and I*? Do you remember Yul Brynner saying in frustration "It's a puzzlement". He might have said "It's a....

- bafflement
- bamboozlement
- befuddlement
- bemusement
- bewilderedness
- bewilderment
- confusedness
- confusion
- discombobulation
- distraction
- fog
- head-scratching
- muddle
- mystification

- perplexity
- tangle

What a wonderful basket-full of synonyms for that frustration we all feel when we just don't understand.

It is, perhaps, significant that there's are so many synonyms. It bears witness to the ubiquity (the ever-presence) of mystery. We live with mystery daily. What, we might ask, are its antonyms: words that are, in meaning, the opposite of mystery. We might offer up "certainty" or "knowledge". Often "mystery" is offered up as a conversation-stopper. What is the meaning of life? Well, it's a mystery; it's a puzzlement; it is just something that can't be explained! End of discussion!

We live with mystery. It is a feature of our everyday life. The French have a word for everyday life "le quotidien" or, in its anglicized form, "the quotidian". We each live in our own version of quotidian. We construct it, have it constructed for us - and we are constructed by it. The French sociologist, *Pierre Bourdieu* used the term "*Habitus*" to describe this social phenomenon. Here is one of my poems addressing the subject.

Habitus

© Karel Reus, April 2022

Revised from a poem titled: *He did the same last week*, (August 2017)

He makes his way between the pews,
hymn and prayer books in one hand,
pew sheet in the other;

(his day pack, as it were, for this recurrent short trip to who knows what).

In passing by he nods to some;
an eyebrow raised,
a formal smile,
hand raised,
no words,
admirable manners and civility,
shorthand body talk,
without closeness.

This is a place where habit reigns.

He did the same last week and the weeks before.

Like others in this sacred space, he knows his place.
He finds his seat, unmarked but understood to be his spot
by all but strangers (mercifully few),
It's been that way since Adam was a lad - or so it seems.

It was his last week and the weeks before,

The organist plays softly;
the tune, familiar, though not rousing, sets a mood.
He checks the hymn list,
grateful that among them are a few he knows,
but irritated that there's one he's never heard or sung.
The matter gets but passing thought.
It's been a while since he sang out loud - anyway.
The minister will no doubt tell his flock
that it is good to try new things.

He did that last week and the weeks before.

A reflex causes him to glance
at the empty spot beside him.
She, of blessed memory, sat there every week,
but now she's gone to God, or so they say.
He has trouble grasping that,
or picturing the look of her at all.
How strange that all those years have left so little trace.

He missed her last week and the weeks before.

His fragment reverie is shattered by the organ's chord
and in comes "Rev" in fancy dress
(where did that ir-Rev-erend thought come from?).
And so the show begins
with the pastor stepping up to that higher place
and telling of the mighty works of God,
and grace, and love, and peace,

as he did last week and the weeks before.

He tries to follow,
but his truant mind diverts and taunts him,
taking him down twisting paths.
He tries, O God he tries, but fails.
The pastor, nice bloke though he is, cannot connect.
The sermon ends but he cannot bring to mind the point of it,
assuming that it had one.
Was it about sin and forgiveness?
Those ideas he still can't grasp,
despite the memories of hurts he caused ...and injuries.
He tries to pray, but fails. He tries again.

It was the same last week and the weeks before.

The final prayers and hymns march on, and then it ends.
His back is sore. He never mentions it,
but pain is what he pays

for this strange hour in the house of God.
Were he to bother, he might see his pain as penance,
but he won't, because it's not his word,

nor was it last week or the weeks before.

He shuffles from the pew,
and in the aisle a woman asks about his health
and a bloke shakes hands and says g'day
and someone comments on the weather
and invites him to stay for a cuppa and a cake.

It was the same last week and the weeks before.

In time he gets back home,
seeks out his favourite chair,
registers the emptiness and
remote control in hand
he falls asleep.

He did the same last week and the weeks before.

The Habitus encompasses certainty and mystery, but the habitus of our church-going elderly man has lost its mystery-content. We live as if it is the certainties that count, but the mysteries also play (or also ought to play) a great part in our everyday lives from time to the time. Here are a few mysteries we might visit from time to time:

- What is the meaning of life?
- Is my existence meaningful?
- What was the origin of life?
- What causes that amazing moment when a child becomes self-conscious?
- What is love?
- Why do we hate?
- Why does forgiveness work?
- Is my life determined.
- Is there a God, and is what he/she like?
- Can I really and truly understand what it is like to be the person sitting next to me.

Most, if not all, of these everyday mysteries will never be explained to our satisfaction nor to the satisfaction of those around us. Not that we shouldn't ask the questions. Not that we shouldn't try to explain the inexplicable. That is another great mystery. How come we, of all creation of which we are aware can ask such questions?

We can surely recognise that we are the part of creation that asks questions. That is our thing. Our *raison d'être*. The fact that we don't get clear and definitive answers should not worry us. We are not complete unless we are posing questions — and the harder the better!

Our faith, and its material manifestation; the Church, is part of our habitus - is part of our question-asking environment. In fact, we get rather irritated when our church puts the big questions aside. So we want the church to ask us to think about such imponderable mysteries like:

- What is God like?
- How do we explain creation and our part in the church?
- Did Jesus rise from the dead?
- Will we rise from the dead?
- Will Jesus come again?
- Can sin be forgiven?
- What is sin, anyway?
- Who am I?
- What am I?

This week the church asks us to think about a very strange event -- Jesus with two of his disciples on a mountaintop. Jesus looking wonderful - all brightness and light - and Elijah and Moses there too - and a cloud and God's voice.

Listen to the story again and try to enter into the mystery.

17Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. 3Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' 5While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' 6When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' 8And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

What does it all mean? A lot of books have been written in search of an answer - and a lot of sermons preached. Many "experts" tell us that this event is showing Jesus in his true colours. This is the Jesus of the heights as distinct from Jesus of the plain. Here is Jesus as Godly Man, as distinct from Jesus and as the manly God. We need both, we are told. We, in the guise of disciples, try to make sense of it all and try to capture the divine in buildings and institutions. We had better hold our tongues about such things. The disciples want to confine Jesus in their own quotidian - in the strictures of time and place. But Jesus understands that there is more to life than that, that we that live lives of practicality. Yes, indeed we do. But we also we lives of mystery -- of questions that may never be answered.

We live in a field of things -- of practicalities, but we live also in a field of meanings.

We follow Jesus from the plain to the mountain today. Glory be! The Transfiguration In about breaking free and living more abundantly.

May it be so

HYMN: TIS 690 Beauty for brokenness,...

Prayer – Prepared by David Northwood

Lord we pray
Hear our prayer today
As we pray for others
And for ourselves

We acknowledge that nearly 20,000 refugees will soon be able to apply for permanency, giving them the same rights as permanent residents after being kept “in limbo” for years.

The changes – hailed by refugee advocates as “a victory of unity and compassion over division and fear” – were part of a Labor election promise. They mean that about 19,000 temporary protection and safe haven enterprise visa holders will be eligible to apply for a permanent resolution of status visa.

This was due in part by the support of refugee rights through the Palm Sunday marches attended by several members of this congregation.

Heather and David, Warwick and Anne, Brenda and Walter and Hans are just a few of the supporters.

There is still more to be done in advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers. We offer our prayers and support for the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre as they struggle through difficult financial times.

As we move into the new year, let us give thanks for all we hold dear: our health, our family and our friends.

Let us release our grudges, our anger and our pains, for these are nothing but binding chains. Let us live each day in the most loving ways, the God-conscious way. Let us serve all who are in need, regardless of race, color or creed.

Let us keep the God of our own understanding in our hearts and to chant God's name each day. Let us lead the world from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth and from wrong to right.

Let us remember that we are all one, embracing all, discriminating against none.

May your year be filled with peace, prosperity and love. May God's blessings shower upon you and bestow upon each of you a bright, healthy and peaceful new year.

And in this year open our eyes to the beauty and mystery of the world around us.

For if our imagination were not so weak, so easily tired, if our capacity for wonder were not so limited, we would abandon forever such fantasies of the supernal.

We would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence, more than sufficient of the absolute and marvellous, more than enough console us for the loss of the ancient dreams.

Amen

Blessing

(May) Christ dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[Ephesians 3:17-19](#)

HYMN: TIS 779 May the feet of God walk with you...

Thoughts for the week to come

I have been reading a book about a dozen or so remarkable people. We might call them modern saints. They all lived during the last century, and their lives have shown us the various ways our faith might be lived out. We look at their lives in wonder. We should not try to copy them but allow them to find our own unique ways to live out our faith at this time and in our own place.

This week, I am going to look at Dorothy Day. From the Wikipedia we find the following biographical details:

Dorothy Day (November 8, 1897 – November 29, 1980) was an American journalist, social activist and [anarchist](#) who, after a [bohemian](#) youth, became a [Catholic](#) without abandoning her social and anarchist activism. She was perhaps the best-known [political radical](#) among [American Catholics](#).^{[1][2]}

Day's conversion is described in her 1952 autobiography, [The Long Loneliness](#).^{[3][4]} Day was also an active journalist, and described her social activism in her writings. In 1917 she was imprisoned as a member of suffragist [Alice Paul](#)'s nonviolent [Silent Sentinels](#). In the 1930s, Day worked closely with fellow activist [Peter Maurin](#) to establish the [Catholic Worker Movement](#), a pacifist movement that combines direct aid for the poor and homeless with [nonviolent direct action](#) on their behalf. She practiced [civil disobedience](#), which led to additional arrests in 1955,^[5] 1957,^[6] and in 1973 at the age of seventy-five.^[1]

As part of the Catholic Worker Movement, Day co-founded the [Catholic Worker](#) newspaper in 1933, and served as its editor from 1933 until her death in 1980. In this newspaper, Day advocated the Catholic economic theory of [distributism](#), which she considered a third way between [capitalism](#) and [socialism](#).^{[7][8]} [Pope Benedict XVI](#) used her conversion story as an example of how to "journey towards faith... in a secularized environment."^[3] In an address before the [United States Congress](#), [Pope Francis](#) included her in a list of four exemplary Americans who "buil[t] a better future".^[9]

The Catholic Church has opened the cause for Day's possible [canonization](#), which was accepted by the [Holy See](#) for investigation. For that reason, the Church refers to her with the title of [Servant of God](#).

In Dorothy Day's own words

Help My Unbelief

FAITH, MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD, is a gift. We cannot give it to each other, but certainly we can pray God to give it to others. Péguy *wrote: "When we get to heaven, God is going to say to us, 'Where are the others?'"

Ask and You Will Receive

BEING ON ONE'S KNEES is not entirely necessary. That was an attitude of reverence from courtly days. Jews stood. When our Lord went into the desert or up on the mountain to pray, he was not necessarily always on his knees. One can walk with the Lord. I remember how I used to pray, walking on the beach. ... I do not have to retire to my room to pray. It is enough to get out and walk in the wilderness of the streets.

WE DO NOT ASK church or state for help, but we ask individuals, those who have subscribed to the Catholic Worker and so are evidently interested in what we are doing, presumably willing and able to help. Many a priest and bishop send help year after year. Somehow the dollars that come in cover current bills, help us to catch up with payments on back debts, and make it possible for us to keep on going. There is never anything left over, and we always have a few debts to keep us worrying, to make us more like the very poor we are trying to help. The wolf is not at the door, but he is trotting along beside us. We make friends with him, too, as Saint Francis did. We pray for the help we need, and it comes.

But How to Love?

Saint Teresa said that you can only show your love for God by your love for your neighbour, for your brother and sister. Francois Mauriac, the novelist, and Jacques Maritain, the philosopher, said that when you were working for truth and justice you were working for Christ, even though you denied him. But how to love? That is the question.

I WAS THINKING, how as one gets older, we are tempted to sadness, knowing life as it is here on earth, the suffering, the cross. And how we must overcome it daily, growing in love, and the joy which goes with loving.

Living Together, Working Together

THE ONLY ANSWER in this life, to the loneliness we are all bound to feel, is community. The living together, working together, sharing together, loving God and loving our brother, and living close to him in community so we can show our love for Him.

A philosophy of work and a philosophy of poverty are necessary if we would share with all men what we have, if we would each try to be the least, if we would wash the feet of our brothers. It is necessary if we would so choose to love our brother, live for him and die for him, rather than kill him in war.

I THINK OF YOU ALL so often How I hope you can get a bigger house so you can have discussion groups , a library, a guest room, a Christ room, etc. – all that will go to make a Christian community. The first and greatest of all communities is the home; if things are not right there nothing can make them right.

WE MUST PRACTICE the presence of God. He said that when two or three are gathered together, there he is in the midst of them . He is with us in our kitchens, at our tables, on our breadlines, with our visitors, on our farms. When we pray for our material needs, it brings us close to his humanity. He, too, needed food and shelter; he, too, warmed his hands at a fire and lay down in a boat to sleep.

A Place Where Love Can Grow

IT IS IMPORTANT that we try to stick together and be loyal to each other and try to see each other’s good points. God knows, living together we can see each other’s bad points and weaknesses quick enough. We can be under no delusions. But we can never have enough mutual love.

A COMMUNITY is not a place where “desert fathers” are testing themselves – more and more, harder and harder, each on his own. A community is what Saint Paul told us – our differences granted respect by one another, but those differences are not allowed to turn us into loners. You must know when to find your own, quiet moment of solitude. But you must know when to open the door to go be with others, and you must know how to open the door There’s no point in opening the door with bitterness and resentment in your heart. I have noticed that those alcoholics, those bums and tramps and ne’er-do-wells have a way of reading our faces, getting quickly to the truth of our souls. They do that, I fear, better than we do with one another. We try to protect one another, we “cover” for one another – oh, maybe we don’t want to see in each other what we don’t want to see in the privacy of our own rooms staring into the mirror: our sins at work in our lives .

Sources:

- Epperly, Bruce G., 2020, *Mystics in Action: Twelve Saints for Today*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books.
- Dorothy Day, *The reckless way of love: notes on following Jesus*, Available on Kindle.
- Dorothy Day, *The long loneliness: The autobiography of the legendary Catholic social activist*, Available on Kindle.
- Wikipedia [Dorothy Day - Wikipedia](#)

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Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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Presider: Karel Reus

Music: Peter Hurley

Church Office

Tuesdays, 9.30am-1.30pm

Fridays, 9.30am-2.30pm

Phone: 0411 958 127

office@ormond.unitingchurch.org.au

Website: www.ormondunitingchurch.org

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